

“TOP TEN” DELIVERED @ HOPE, FRESNO 7/8/07 – 6 PENTECOST C

Grace, mercy and peace from God, our Creator and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
AMEN.

(Question of the week: What do Lutherans believe about Evangelism?)

There is an interesting story by Dr. Michael Halleen about a navigator who never navigated. It reminds me of Lutheran evangelism. With that topic, it could be a very short sermon.

BY FAITH WALLS FALL DOWN

By Dr. Michael A. Halleen

Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal (1394-1460) never captained a ship or sailed on a voyage of exploration. He stayed home and read accounts of others who had. He thought about what they said and let his mind march around new theories about what the world must be like. He wondered and imagined, calculated and drew maps. Prince Henry died thirty years before Portuguese explorers were able to test his theories, but when they did, they brought back proof that he had been incredibly accurate. As a result, Portugal took the lead in world exploration for fully a hundred years. Other nations held back, making excuses about internal problems. Other explorers did not see the possibilities or worried about lack of money. They lacked faith to move past what seemed to be insurmountable obstacles.

To feel bound by perceived limits is so human, so common. A century ago there were predictions that no one could ever drive a car 60 miles per hour because the wind would suck one's breath away. In 1934 the track coach at the University of California laid out what he believed were the absolute limits of achievement in track and field events. All of them, of course, have long since been exceeded. High school athletes today are out-performing Olympic champions of a few decades ago. There appears to be no limit to how fast we can run, how far we can go, how high we can leap.

So we do well not to set limits on what we can do and become as children of God if we believe in the power of Christ within us. We do well not to minimize the potential of the people of God when we act in faith. Walls fall down. Families are transformed, communities changed.

When my two grandchildren blow out the candles on their birthday cakes each year and make their wishes, I make one of my own for them. My birthday wish for each is faith, the single quality that will guarantee him a successful life. Faith is simply trust that God is stronger than all the limitations, hurts, fears and problems they may face. I do not pray that they will have superior intellects or well-coordinated bodies. I am not concerned that they be popular or clever, blessed with talent or wealth. I care only that they will persist in faith toward the goals and dreams that God may give them — the Prince Henrys of their time. [[end of quoted story]]

What do Lutherans believe about Evangelism? Who asked this? I suspect a Baptist among us!!

Dr. Alan Culpepper joins today's Gospel lesson with Evangelism with a kind of "top ten list."

"10 PRINCIPLES OF MISSION" (R. Alan Culpepper in New Interpreter's Bible Commentary – Luke)

1. It affirms the world's need for the church's mission: "The harvest is **plentiful**." there is more work to do than laborers to do it.
2. Jesus' commission affirms the importance of prayer in support of the church's mission: "**Ask** the Lord of the harvest."
3. It insists on the active participation of each disciple: "Go on **your** way." The work of the church is not merely the calling of a select few. Believers can contribute to it in their own way and in the context of their spiritual journey.
4. Jesus' commission warns of the dangers disciples will face and provides guidelines: "I am sending you out like **lambs** into the midst of **wolves**." By means of this metaphor, Jesus seems to be counseling innocence and sincerity, vulnerability and non-resistance as means of turning aside anger and danger.
5. Jesus calls for singularity of purpose: "Greet **no one** on the road."
6. The commission specifies the purpose of the mission: "**Say**, 'Peace to this house' and 'the kingdom of God has come near to you.'" Disciples declare what God is doing and bring God's peace to whomever receives them. Share table fellowship with whomever receives you.
7. The host, not the guest, sets the context for the disciple's witness: "Eat what is set before you." The disciples do not seek to dictate the menu or impose their own cultural background on others.
8. Jesus' commission recognizes that the disciples will not always succeed: "[When] they do not welcome you...." Jesus knew that the disciples would meet resistance and rejection some of the time.
9. Jesus admonishes the disciples to persevere: "Shake the dust from your feet."
10. Jesus gives the disciples a word of assurance about the fulfillment of God's redemptive mission: "Know this: the kingdom of God has come near."

By principles such as these the church can be guided in every generation. The context, means, and forms of the message change continually, but its basis in God's redemptive love remains constant. [[end of quoted list]]

In "The Militant Moderate" John Holcomb writes: "You must get involved to have an impact. No one is impressed with the won-lost record of the referee. Jesus sends his disciples out to make a difference in the world. This week Jesus calls us to action for the sake of the gospel. Together with the disciples of every day and age, we are sent out to make an impact as God's people in the world.

In *Christian Chaos: Revolutionizing the Congregation*, by Thomas G. Bandy. He also writes about **JOY**, in the context of spiritual gifts:

Generally speaking, a "spiritual gift" is linked to whatever you profoundly enjoy doing, and which you deeply desire to do with excellence ...

One test to determine whether or not you are really doing what Christ called you to do, is to discern *if you truly and deeply enjoy doing it!* Does this activity give life to you or rob life from you? energize you or spiritually exhaust you? lead you to laugh or lead you to sigh? fill you with joy or leave you with unresolved anger? For first century Christians authentic callings always, always led to joy.

Lay leadership "burnout" is not a biblical church issue. It is a modern church issue. It has become an issue because modern churches habitually motivate people to act out of duty, rather than out of joy. They continually remind people of their obligations, but fail to assist people in affirming themselves [pp. 239, 241, emphasis in original]

What if we could make every activity of the congregation a joyful experience? (Isn't "joyful council meetings" an oxymoron?)

People of Hope, we stand today on the shores of new explorations. Each of us has gifts to use and a host of life circumstances and experiences that both hold us back from stepping into these explorations and give us the challenge to do so. It's not whether we've always or never done it that way before, it's whether the task meets two criteria. Does doing this combine my passion with something that needs to be done?

What do Lutherans believe about Evangelism? We believe that churchwork as just busy work is folly. It's not about the institution, but people. Our mission is "Extending Hope in Jesus." That means people outside the church are as much a target for our mission as those inside it. It is not our challenge to sit back and enjoy what others have done, but to be sent by Jesus to a world of exploration and joy that is set before us, and, trusting only God, begin a new journey into the promises of God. AMEN.